

March 23, 2017

Testimony for the Ways and Means Public Safety Subcommittee
Salem, Oregon

Co-Chairs Winters and Stark and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the proposed cut to the Londer Learning Center in Multnomah County's department of Community Justice.

My name is Cheyenne Tuller, I am a member of AFSCME Local 88, representing the Basic Skills Educator classification for Multnomah County.

I am an instructor at the Londer Learning Center, a reentry program in Portland, Oregon providing ex-offenders with GED instruction, job skills, computer skills, pre-apprenticeship help, and basic life skills. Our program is proposed to be cut at the end of this fiscal year. We serve approximately 500 people per year. This cut would guarantee that adults in reentry without a high school diploma remain unemployed and dependent on government assistance and negatively affect the recidivism rate in Multnomah County.

While it is true that there are other education and employment agencies in Portland, they are cost prohibitive and/or only serve certain ages and ability levels.

Our program costs \$560,000, but we have one current grant, and several other grant and partnering opportunities. Other counties have offered to pay for their clients to access our services.

Oregon has the third worst high school graduation rate in the nation. In Portland, people of color are more likely to drop out of school and to be incarcerated. This lack of access to education has devastating effects. As the Urban League noted in its 2015 State of Black Oregon report, African Americans are severely underrepresented in living wage jobs. Without education, wage earners cannot get ahead.

Londer Learning Center breaks the school to prison pipeline.

Sadly, there are no education programs for adults in our Multnomah County jails—these programs were eliminated more than seven years ago. And in Oregon prisons, GED programs are very limited. A 2011 Bureau of Justice Statistics Report found that 20% of prison inmates and 30% of jail inmates report cognitive disabilities. Upon release Londer Learning Center is the only program accepting adults of any ability, providing them an education they could not otherwise access. All other local GED programs present barriers such as age limitations, cost and/or delayed entry. Unlike other programs, Londer's flexibility allows students to concurrently participate in supervision, treatment and education.

Researchers at the RAND Corporation found that inmates who participate in

correctional education have a 43 percent lower chance of returning to prison.

Londer Learning Center ensures that those who have paid their debt to society get a chance to become productive citizens. It helps students enter apprenticeship programs and transition to community college.

Attorney John Ryan and Presiding Judge Donald Londer founded Londer Learning Center in 1993 with funding from the National Literacy Act. Since then it has helped thousands to get an education, get a job, and stay out of jail.

“Londer Learning Center is where the world around me opened up and I gained a broader perspective of my place in it.” Myldred Silvia, Londer GED Graduate

Thank you for your support.